

St. Mary's Episcopal Church
Anchorage Alaska

Message by Rev. Israel Portilla Gomez
August 28, 2022



May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

You know one thing, **I have been waiting to deliver this sermon for over a year, right here in front of you. And I'm glad this day has come.**

As one of you told me: "the wait was so long, that when you finally arrived, we were surprised". I am also surprised and deeply grateful to God and to all of you.

I want to start by sharing a few words from the reading from the Hebrews: "*Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*"

Let me tell you, for sure, that we are not angels, but we are strangers, foreigners. And you have practiced hospitality so well that we feel at home. We have not felt so loved before as we do here, as a family. We come from another country, from another culture (two diverse cultures, in fact, because my wife is from Latvia). We come from another time zone. We speak another language (or two) at home. It is not that difficult to notice it. This is my third language. A wonderful

person from this community told me that St. Mary`s is a forgiving community, so, thank you for being patient if you do not always understand my accent. I hope every time we meet is going to be a step closer to us understanding and knowing each other better.

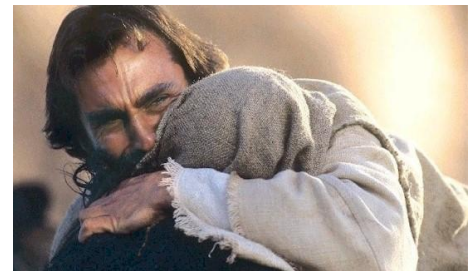
We have been received as one of you, as our Lord tells us. As I already told you, my wife is from Latvia. My son is Colombian and Latvian. I am Colombian. Please do not worry if you do not know where our countries are; they are not that big and well-known. I believe some of you can understand this because you live in Alaska.

I'll tell you a joke:

A friend in Colombia wrote to me if I had already arrived here. I told her: yes, we were in Anchorage, Alaska already. She replied: I thought you had gone to the United States. To which I replied: Sure, Alaska is in the United States.

I want to share a reflection on today's Gospel with you. We can summarize it with the word humility. What is humility?

C. S. Lewis, a famous British writer, has an excellent saying about the word 'humility'. He says: "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less." A study from psychologists at Queen's University, says that the average human has 6,200 thoughts per day. How many of these thoughts are only about our own needs? Is there room for others?



I invite you to imagine a scene from the past with Jesus at its center. Jesus was invited to eat a meal by some Pharisees. Let us remember that at the time of Jesus human beings were not equal in dignity before society. Some were worth more than others depending on their money, gender, ethnicity, and their social status. Jesus probably saw that the guests were scrambling to occupy the premium seats. They each wanted to show how important they were. This gives us an idea that the host invited the most powerful people in the society of that time. I mean, you could see who was who at that meal, who were the VIPs.

**How can I value myself
as God values me
and at the same time
how can I value others
as God's children?**

Does that happen today?

Jesus takes advantage of this scenario to give a powerful message. He talks about the importance of Recognizing Every Person's God-given Dignity. For God, all people have the same dignity. The value of a person does not depend on having a position or sitting in a privileged seat. The value of each person, of each one of us, is that we are created in the image and likeness of God. We are loved by God. Surely, Jesus' recommendation to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind sounded scandalous. It absolutely changed their way of valuing people. Nobody is more or less important than the other. We are all VIPs for God even if we do not fly business class or belong to the biggest golf club in town.

Today, for us, this is a message to direct a resistant gaze upon ideologies that diminish the humanity of others. The true goodness, which deserves a reward for God, is about caring about the needs of others without seeking a reward.

I would like to leave you with this invitation or this question:

How can I value myself as God values me and at the same time how can I value others as God's children?

And I would like to end with a Christian prayer for humility, who author is unknown. I invite you to pray it with me.

Lord Jesus, when you walked the earth,
 Your humility obscure your Kingship.
 Your meekness confused the arrogant,
 Hindering them from grasping your purpose,
 Your nobleness attending to the destitute.
 Teach me to model after your eminence,
 To subject my human nature to humility.
 Grant me with a natural inclination
 To never view myself greater than anyone.
 Banish all lingering sparks of self-importance
 That could elevate me greater than you.
 Let my heart always imitate your humility.